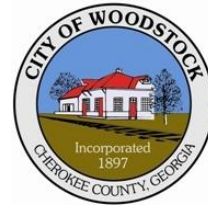


2015 State of the City

*City of Woodstock, GA
Donnie Henriques, Mayor
January 25, 2016*



2015 was a banner year for the City of Woodstock. *Money* Magazine named Woodstock as one of the “Best Places to Live in 2015” in the United States of America. While it is nice to be recognized by this prestigious publication, I would like to point out that they got the ranking wrong in one respect. We’re not number 50. We’re number 1! At least in our hearts and minds.

I truly believe that many of the decisions that this Council made during the depths of the “Great Recession” led to us being where we are today. And I would submit to you that we are at the point in time that we are facing equally big and momentous decisions that we will have to make in 2016.

But first, let’s take a look at what was accomplished in 2015.

General Administration

We started 2015 off with Rob Usher in Ward 6 being sworn in to fulfill Tessa Basford’s unexpired term. We ended the year with David Potts being elected to serve Ward 2 and Tracy Collins to serve Ward 4. Welcome aboard all.

I should stop right here and say a few words about Chris Casdia and Liz Baxter. I would like to thank both of them for their service to our City. Making the commitment to serve on Council is not an easy task. It is very demanding on your time and can be stressful at times. Some times more stressful than others. I appreciate both of their dedication to our community and willingness to serve to help make Woodstock what it is today.

As many of you may have noticed, we started the Phase 2 renovations to City Center in 2015 that were recently completed. We demolished Building B, added much needed restrooms and renovated the lobby. I think it turned out very well.

Our IT Department implemented a video conferencing system that allows the Fire Department to train remotely in their stations rather than having to all be in one place. IT also began the rollout of new hardware for the citywide software project and began the process of upgrading our primary telephone system. Part of this upgrade is the development of a redundant system that will remain active and functional in case of disaster.

Our Finance Department receive an “Unmodified” or clean opinion without any reportable conditions in the recently completed audit. The General Fund showed a

surplus of \$1.1 million for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2015. And we were able to reduce the overall debt by \$4.5 million last fiscal year.

The City was able to increase its Reserve Fund to almost \$3 million dollars, while rolling back the millage rate from 7.25 mills to 6.992 mills. The City's funding ratio of its pension plan stands at 96.92%, which is outstanding and well above state and national averages.

Three members of the Finance Department graduated from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government for Finance Officers. In addition, the Finance Department received its 21st consecutive Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting award from the Government Finance Officers Association.

The last thing I would like to mention under the topic of General Administration is that December 30th saw the retirement of our Deputy City Clerk Rhonda Smith. Smitty was greatly loved by all and will be dearly missed.

Community Development Department

In February, Jessica Guinn left the Director's position to become the Assistant City Manager in Dunwoody. Brantley Day was selected as her replacement. Brantley, we are glad you are on board.

A wide array of residential and commercial projects were permitted in 2015 totaling almost \$200 million in value. These projects generated almost \$1 million in Parks and Recreation impact fees that will be used for adding parks and recreation opportunities in the City. Some 386 single family homes were permitted in 2015, the most since the mid-2000's.

Woodstock City Church (formerly Watermarke Church) was constructed on Ridgewalk Parkway. This facility totals some 176,000 square feet and will open in February.

Camellia Place on Rope Mill Road, an assisted living community for senior adults, hosts 96 rooms over six residential buildings and totals some 60,000 square feet and will open soon.

Two new office buildings were constructed on Molly Lane totaling 54,000 square feet. A 33,000 square foot addition to the Outlet Shoppes of Atlanta was completed and will be home to Eddie Bauer, the Limited and Banana Republic, just to name a few of the tenants.

Sam's Club opened in November of 2015, boasting over 136,000 square feet. On a personal note, replacing the old abandoned Wal-Mart site was one of my priorities in my first campaign for Mayor. I am glad to see this come to reality.

After many years of pursuing a home in Cherokee County, Stars & Strikes selected the former Ingles building as the location for their 51,000 square foot family entertainment center.

Woodstock was presented with a CREATE Community Award from the ARC in March for our partnership with Elm Street Cultural Arts Village. This was the second CREATE award the City has received. In September, we were chosen from 26 communities to receive funding for a mural to be painted in downtown during a competitive grant process from the Atlanta Regional Public Art Program. In November the City was notified that we achieved recertification as a Green Community by the ARC. We actually improved from the Silver Level Certification to the Gold Level Certification.

Our GIS Division added new and improved web and mobile applications available on our City website, used to provide live and up to date mapping information for both the city and the county. These are available at gis.woodstockga.gov. In addition, our GIS Manager Katie Keys received the Geographic Information Systems Professional certification, the highest professional certification in the GIS field. Congratulations Katie.

Economic Development Services/DDA/Main Street Program

The DDA entered into a long-term agreement with Chattahoochee Tech and Cherokee Office of Economic Development to establish an Economic Development Innovation Center and a long-term solution for the Office of Economic Development/DDA/CVB and Main Street. The space will allow for continued business growth and collaboration space for the students of Chattahoochee Tech and the greater Woodstock and Cherokee County Community. The site of the Center is the recently renovated Chattahoochee Tech Campus here in Woodstock. If you haven't had a chance to see the renovated facilities, I encourage you to do so. They really did a good job.

Our DDA invested heavily in landscaping, pedestrian improvements, and shared dumpster space in the Wall Street corridor to continue to visually improve this important entrance to Downtown. As part of this project, the Greenprints trail system was expanded to connect the Noonday Creek Trail to Main Street via the conversion of Elm Street to a one-way street.

Business growth in Downtown continued to show strong growth with the opening of 21 new businesses and the creation of 190 jobs. There were 115 new homes constructed in Downtown in 2015. The total value of all construction in just Downtown was over \$51 million in public and private investment for the year.

The Woodstock Visitor's Center had a record-breaking year welcoming over 11,000 visitors, surpassing the previous high of 9,700 in 2012. It is estimated that over 125,000 people visited Downtown for 189 events in 2015. From Friday Night Live, Scavenger

Hunts, the Concert Series, Scarecrow Invasion, book signings just to name a few, there was something offered for everyone.

The first phase of the wayfinding sign program was completed with the installation of two information kiosks. The Woodstock Farmer's Market continued to grow with some 55 vendors at its peak in 2015. And volunteers in our Main Street program donated over 34,000 hours of service last year. Think about that for a second – 34,000 hours. I can't give our volunteers enough credit for the success of Downtown.

Finally, I need to mention something that actually happened in early 2016. Jimmy T. Long resigned as Chairman of the DDA. He served the DDA for over 11 years and was Chair for much of its growth and the resurgence of Downtown Woodstock. We thank Jimmy for his dedication to the businesses, organizations and residents of Downtown. Many of the physical improvements seen today can be traced back to visions that Jimmy has shared with stakeholders over the years of involvement with the DDA. We will be working with the DDA Board on an appropriate way to recognize Jimmy for his contributions in the near future.

Fire Department

Although I mentioned this in last year's address, it bears repeating again. In April, we received official notification that the Woodstock Fire Department had received an ISO rating of 1, the best that you can receive. At the time, we were only the 7th department in the State of Georgia and the 101st in the United State of America to achieve the rating. Congratulations again to Chief Soumas and the men and women of the Woodstock Fire Department on this outstanding accomplishment.

Woodstock Fire responded to 4,867 calls for service in 2015. We replaced our old ladder truck with a new state of the art one-hundred foot aerial apparatus and equipment. This \$1.1 million investment will serve our City for the next fifteen to twenty years. The truck was featured by the manufacturer at the International Fire Symposium at the World Congress Center in Atlanta. In addition, we also purchased a new rescue truck.

We purchased I-pads for fire apparatus to aid in reporting in the field. Fire personnel performed maintenance on over 1,700 fire hydrants in the City. Finally, the Department hosted their first Open House for the residents of Woodstock.

Parks and Recreation

2015 was a very successful year for our nationally accredited Parks and Recreation Department. The 18th Annual Summer Concert Series included performances by

Savannah Jack, Eliminator KC, Departure and Electric Avenue, The Rupert's Orchestra and Gimme Abbey. Attendance for the 2015 Series was estimated at over 50,000 people.

The City's Fourth of July Festival and Fireworks were very successful, despite the parade being cancelled due to thunderstorms. Our annual fireworks display went off without a hitch and brought an estimated 30,000 people to the Highway 92 corridor to view the display. Stars and Strikes was the title sponsor for the City's Fourth of July events.

Other special events in 2015 included: the Arbor Day Celebration, Great American Clean-up, Greenstock Day and Electronic Recycling, Memorial Day Celebration, Wing and Rock Fest, September Brown Bag Concert Series, 9/11 Day of Remembrance, KidsFest, Veteran's Day Ceremony and the Christmas Jubilee.

The William G. Long Senior Center has grown to over 715 members, an increase of 40 over the prior year. Our new bus has been ordered and we expect to take delivery in the first quarter of 2016. Our continued growth has warranted an expansion of the facilities. We are in the initial stages of the design and hope to be on track for the expansion to be completed in the fourth quarter of 2017.

Woofstock Park continues to be one of our most utilized parks. It has well surpassed our expectations in daily usage with over 150 estimated visits every day. Due to the popularity of the park and it being a trailhead for the much utilized Noonday Creek Trail, we added 30 additional parking spaces to the park.

Speaking of the Noonday Creek Trail, trail counters showed over 200,000 users from May to December of 2015. A new pavilion was constructed in 2015 near the Woofstock Park boardwalk extension.

We also added 40 parking spaces to the overflow parking lot at Rope Mill Park. Trail improvements in 2015 included a realignment of the Avalanche Trail to move the entrance closer to the main parking lot and the addition of a new trail called The Mill, which added five new miles of mountain bike trails. This gives us a total of some 15 miles of mountain bike trails at Rope Mill Park. We also began construction of a new restroom facility at the park.

Dupree Park saw some exciting additions in 2015. New exercise equipment was installed at the Fitness Trail. The new fitness area features ten exercise stations and includes equipment specifically designed for individuals with disabilities. A new Disk Golf Course was also added featuring 18 "holes" and is considered a Par 2 course. Other improvements at Dupree Park included resurfacing the tennis courts, the construction of a new pavilion and new park benches and landscaping.

And I save the best for last. We broke ground on our long awaited amphitheater. Construction is expected to take up to a year. We are certainly excited about what this addition to Downtown Woodstock will hold for the future.

Police Department

The Woodstock Police Department responded to 39,342 calls for service in 2015, representing a decrease of 4% compared to 2014. There were 14% fewer Part 1 crimes in 2015, representing a decrease of 97 crimes. Part 1 crimes are defined as rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny from auto and larceny other. Violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assaults) were down 18.75% in 2015. Throughout the year, WPD officers made 1,313 arrests, including 224 for drug related offenses.

During the year, officers conducted 1,869 foot patrols and 112 bike patrols to promote more direct citizen-officer contact. In addition, the department conducted eight driving classes for teenagers with 200 participants, two Citizen Public Safety Academy sessions, reaching 46 citizens. That brings the total number of graduates of the Public Safety Academy since its inception to over 400 now.

The all-volunteer Woodstock Police Auxiliary Unit and Reserve Officer Unit continued to provide exemplary support during the year, donating more than 1,600 hours of deployment time in 2015.

The WPD Explorer Post remained active during the year, competing against Explorer posts throughout the Southeast. The team participated in three major competitions in Gatlinburg, TN, Forsyth and Austell, GA where they competed against 135 other Explorer posts from throughout the United States. In 2015, WPD Explorers achieved one first place, one third place, and four other top 10 finishes in various categories.

The 501(c)(3) non-profit Woodstock Public Safety Foundation was active during the year, raising more than \$55,000 through a variety of events. Funds raised are used to assist the Police and Fire Departments in obtaining unbudgeted equipment, emergency support for officers and firefighters injured in the line of duty, and to ensure a good Christmas for area children in need through the annual Shop with a Hero program. In 2015, 144 children participated in the program.

In 2015, WPD was able to acquire enough Taser electronic control devices to issue one to each officer whose primary duties involve responding to 911 calls. Tasers are important to officers as an alternative to hands-on, physical confrontations in order to subdue a combative or uncooperative subject and to reduce injuries.

Captain Kevin Culpepper successfully completed FBI National Academy Executive Development Course and received his Intermediate and Managerial Certification from Georgia P.O.S.T. Similarly, Lieutenant Matt O'Keefe successfully completed the School of Police Staff and Command presented by Northwestern University's Center for Public Safety. During 2015, Chief Moss was elected chair of the Cherokee County Multi-Agency Narcotics Squad Control Board. He was also appointed as chair of the statewide Training Committee of the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police.

Finally, WPD was selected by the Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) as a winner in the 2nd Annual “Community Policing in Action” photo contest. As a result, the photo you see on the monitors will be featured on the COPS website, Facebook and Twitter headers during 2016, as well as being featured in the COPS Office e-newsletter.

The photo, taken by Darlene Prem, features Mr. Chester H. Reeve, who proudly served his country in the Burma, China, and India campaign during World War II. Mr. Reeve passed away shortly after this photo was taken at the age of 95 ½ years of age. Mr. Reeve was escorted in this photo by Officer Keith McGaw, who is himself retired from the United States Army. The distinction of this photo being selected by the COPS Office was indeed a fitting memorial to Mr. Chester Reeve and WPD’s community policing efforts.

Public Works Department

The Public Works Department was also very busy during 2015. Over 1.5 miles of roadways were resurfaced, along with 11.5 miles of striping completed. Phase IV of the Ridgewalk widening project was completed, along with improvement around the Mill Street Parking lot. Our Public Works offices at Bell Park were also renovated.

Through diligent efforts, we saw an improvement of 17% in our water loss ratio from 2014 to 2015, resulting in the saving of over 26 million gallons of water. We also added 529 water/sewer customers during the year.

Our Stormwater Division rehabbed three pipes located on Justin Drive and Bentley Parkway. They collected 249,997 pounds of debris using the street sweeper, inspected 1,000 catch basins and collected 1,040 pounds of debris as part of the Rivers Alive Clean-up. They also processed 276 Christmas trees as part of the “Bring One for the Chipper” event.

Closing

As you can tell, 2015 was a busy year. We made a lot of progress as a community and there is still a lot that needs to be done.

If you will remember back to the depths of the “Great Recession” in 2009, 2010, and 2011, this Council took some bold steps to keep this City moving forward. I feel that many of those decisions paved the way for our rebound as a community. In other words, we are reaping the benefits now from those decisions. Buying the Annex, buying City Center, buying the right of way needed for the interchange at the outlet mall, and Elm Street just to name a few. There were those who criticized every move we made. Ironically, some of the same ones are now criticizing us for not doing more. The bottom line is that what we did worked.

President Ronald Reagan once said “America is too great for small dreams.” I would submit to you that his quote applies to Woodstock, Georgia as well. I believe that now is the time that we need to make other decisions that will require you to be bold. Decisions regarding transportation, decisions regarding parking in Downtown, decisions regarding trail expansion just to name a few. Some will criticize you for the decisions. But as I have always told you, don’t be afraid to do the right thing. Don’t be afraid to keep moving forward. Don’t be afraid to be BOLD. Don’t be afraid to dream BIG. The time is now.